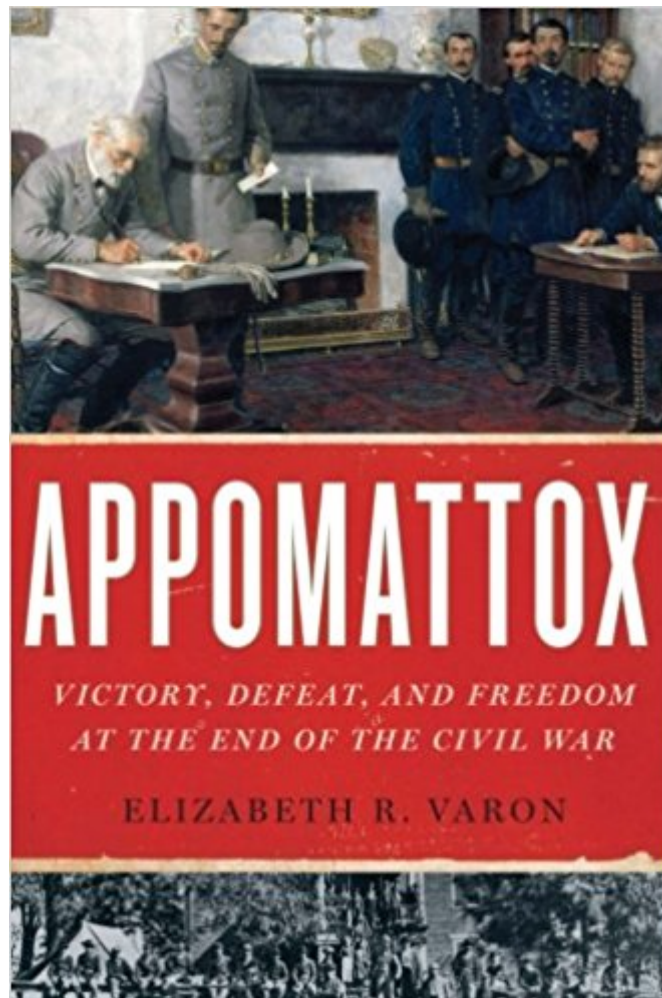




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Appomattox: Victory, Defeat, And Freedom At The End Of The Civil War



Synopsis

Winner, Library of Virginia Literary Award for Nonfiction Winner, Eugene Feit Award in Civil War Studies, New York Military Affairs Symposium Winner of the Dan and Marilyn Laney Prize of the Austin Civil War Round Table Finalist, Jefferson Davis Award of the Museum of the Confederacy Best Books of 2014, Civil War Monitor 6 Civil War Books to Read Now, Diane Rehm Show, NPR Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House evokes a highly gratifying image in the popular mind -- it was, many believe, a moment that transcended politics, a moment of healing, a moment of patriotism untainted by ideology. But as Elizabeth Varon reveals in this vividly narrated history, this rosy image conceals a seething debate over precisely what the surrender meant and what kind of nation would emerge from war. The combatants in that debate included the iconic Lee and Grant, but they also included a cast of characters previously overlooked, who brought their own understanding of the war's causes, consequences, and meaning. In Appomattox, Varon deftly captures the events swirling around that well remembered-but not well understood-moment when the Civil War ended. She expertly depicts the final battles in Virginia, when Grant's troops surrounded Lee's half-starved army, the meeting of the generals at the McLean House, and the shocked reaction as news of the surrender spread like an electric charge throughout the nation. But as Varon shows, the ink had hardly dried before both sides launched a bitter debate over the meaning of the war and the nation's future. For Grant, and for most in the North, the Union victory was one of right over wrong, a vindication of free society; for many African Americans, the surrender marked the dawn of freedom itself. Lee, in contrast, believed that the Union victory was one of might over right: the vast impersonal Northern war machine had worn down a valorous and unbowed South. Lee was committed to peace, but committed, too, to the restoration of the South's political power within the Union and the perpetuation of white supremacy. These two competing visions of the war's end paved the way not only for Southern resistance to reconstruction but also our ongoing debates on the Civil War, 150 years later. Did America's best days lie in the past or in the future? For Lee, it was the past, the era of the founding generation. For Grant, it was the future, represented by Northern moral and material progress. They held, in the end, two opposite views of the direction of the country-and of the meaning of the war that had changed that country forever.

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Customer Reviews

Winner, Library of Virginia Literary Award for Nonfiction Winner, Eugene Feit Award in Civil War Studies, New York Military Affairs Symposium Winner of the Dan and Marilyn Laney Prize of the Austin Civil War Round Table Finalist, Jefferson Davis Award of the Museum of the Confederacy Best Books of 2014, Civil War Monitor 6 Civil War Books to Read Now, Diane Rehm Show, NPR"Varon's work is a balanced inquiry into the meanings of the Appomattox peace for Northerners and Southerners, whites and blacks, men and women... Appomattox is equally adept at illuminating the war's meaning on the home front and in political halls... [Varon] successfully resurrects the true April 1865 event as one fraught with anxiety, passion, and, above all, political conflict." --North Carolina Historical Review"[A] compelling new account of the war's end... Rather than emphasizing the finality of military defeat, Varon stresses the uncertainty of the subsequent days, weeks, and months." --Sarah Bowman, Civil War Monitor"A very fine account... In the end, as Varon so ably demonstrates, Appomattox did not end a war. It just closed the phase of that contest characterized by armed conflict. The much older war would go on. In some ways, it is not over yet." --William C. Davis, History Book Club"Excellent and thought-provoking...Varon...treats Appomattox as a major event in American history, worth extensive analysis, but also as a very engaging human story." --James E. Sefton, Civil War Book Review"Elizabeth Varon successfully argues in her groundbreaking book that the seeds for the post-Civil War world started before the ink had dried on the surrender agreement signed by Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House... A careful construction and analysis of the meaning of Appomattox to many different people." --James Percoco, Civil War News"A careful, scholarly consideration of how the ambiguities surrounding the defeat of the South resolved into the bitter eras of Reconstruction and Jim Crow." --Kirkus Reviews"In this powerful analysis of the substantive and symbolic meanings of the

surrender at Appomattox, Elizabeth Varon shows how that iconic moment has shaped a range of perceptions of the Civil War and its consequences. Grant and Lee emerge with new richness and complexity in this important book, one of the best to appear during these years of the war's sesquicentennial anniversaries." --James McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*"In lively prose, Elizabeth Varon demonstrates that much of what we think we know about Lee's surrender to Grant in April 1865 is misleading, embellished, or just plain wrong, but even more important, she portrays the ending of the Civil War less as a moment of innocence than as long process, begun before the ink on the surrender signatures had dried, in which white and black Americans of all regions and varying political stripes shrewdly contested the meaning of the war." --Chandra Manning, author of *What This Cruel War Was Over*"In a short space, Elizabeth Varon has not only given us a graceful narrative of the epochal surrender at Appomattox, but has also awakened us to the bitterly-contested meanings of that surrender. The war that ended at Appomattox did not subside into a happy story of fraternal reconciliation, but into an ongoing struggle between those who believed the war had brought a new age of freedom and equality into existence, and those who fought to keep the South's feudal past upon its throne. We will not be able to look at Appomattox, or the legacy of the Civil War, in simplistic terms again." --Allen C. Guelzo, author of *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*"Elizabeth Varon's elegant meditation on the complex legacy of the Appomattox surrender combines finely grained social history with penetrating analysis of one of the great mythic moments in American history. Closing out the Civil War, Lee and Grant's fateful meeting ushered in a harmonious reunion of a country destined for greatness. Or did it? Varon's meticulous unpacking of the layers of falsehood surrounding the myth lays bare a painful truth-that there was no unified vision of what peace might bring to a troubled and still bitterly divided nation." --Joan Waugh, University of California, Los Angeles"Based on exceptionally thorough research, Elizabeth Varon's study meticulously dissects the sentimental, romantic version of the Appomattox story, which portrays it as an apolitical, magnanimous event. Varon shows convincingly that Robert E. Lee and other Confederates made the Army of Northern Virginia's surrender the opening shot in the battle over Reconstruction, and that the seeds of Reconstruction's failure were sown at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865." --Michael Burlingame, author of *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*"Varon probes deep into the psyches of Lee and Grant and analyzes them with fresh eyes to understand what kind of nation they envisioned emerging from the wreckage of war... Varon also delves into the letters, diaries, and memoirs left by the men of the two armies who fought each other during those last desperate days... In her clear, confident, yet elegant, prose, Varon gives renewed life to many of the players in the last act of America's greatest tragedy." --Gordon Berg, Civil War Round Table of the

District of Columbia "We are always looking for books that enable us to see the Lees in a new way. Elizabeth Varon's new book, *Appomattox: Victory, Defeat, and Freedom at the End of the Civil War* does just that... A compelling tale." --Paul Reber, Executive Director, Stratford Hall "Varon is effective in dispelling the various myths that have sprung up over the surrender itself, including the fabled meeting under an apple tree, which never happened. Using a wealth of primary and secondary sources, the work is excellent in never treating either North or South as monolithic. The author thoroughly discusses the roles of African Americans in both sections, and gives the political opponents in both regions their say." --K.L. Gorman, Minnesota State University, Mankato, CHOICE "Elizabeth Varon's elegant narrative, provocative argument, and skillful use of sources make this work an interesting addition to the historiography of the Civil War Era." --Southern Literary Review "A compelling account of the courses taken by Grant and Lee and a superb look at how the public in both sections endeavored to understand what had happened-and what it portended for the future." --Ethan S. Rafuse, *America's Civil War*

Elizabeth R. Varon is Langbourne M. Williams Professor of American History at the University of Virginia. A noted Civil War historian, she is the author of *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859*; *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*; and *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew, A Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy*, which was named one of the "Five Best" books on the "Civil War away from the battlefield" by the Wall Street Journal.

Appomattox! A name which will live in historical memory in the mind of the nation. On Palm Sunday April 9, 1855 the immaculately dressed Robert E. Lee general of the Army of Northern Virginia tendered the surrender of his forces to General U.S. Grant in a small parlor in Appomattox Virginia. This famous event is known to every schoolchild and the myths and legends surrounding it are well known. Now it is the task of Dr. Elizabeth R. Varon a Civil war scholar of note and professor of history at the University of Virginia to dispel the myths surrounding the surrender ceremony and give us a 21st century view of the momentous occasion Varon has accomplished an impeccable job of researching original sources such as soldier's letters, newspaper accounts and memoirs to give us a first hand understanding of Appomattox and its implications. Among the things I learned by reading this scholarly work are": a. Robert E. Lee was a white supremacist who was against African-American equality. He wanted the South to be restored to the Union with all of its ante-bellum society of white rule preserved. This view of Lee will not set well with Lost Cause and

Lee worshippers but it is the truth of the great general's views. Lee opposed the Radical Republicans favoring the approach of President Andrew Johnson who pardoned thousands of Confederate soldiers and wanted reconstruction to maintain the white society of Dixie. b. Ulysses Simpson Grant viewed the Civil War as a huge step in achieving racial citizenship and equality for African-Americans. He favored the Civil Rights Bill which was vetoed by President Andrew Johnson. Grant allied himself with the Republican Party as did James Longstreet, William Mahone and John Mosby., Grant looked to America's future while Lee looked backward viewing our greatest historical era to be that of his hero George Washington and the Revolutionary War generation. Grant emerges as a hero in the eyes of this reviewer! c. Varon does an excellent job in showing how black Americans who had been freed from slavery looked upon Appomattox as a victory for freedom. They were to be disappointed as southern white supremacy ruled the South and black people were persecuted. Varon refers to the horrible Memphis riot against blacks in 1866. d. The myth developed that Lee was vastly outnumbered in troop strength during the Appomattox campaign. Varon shows that Lee opposed by a force of 2-1. e. Lee and Grant were not friends and had vastly different visions of American society. I first saw Elizabeth Varon on C-Span lecturing on this book. It is the best book I have read on this pivotal event in American history. Highly recommended to Civil War buffs and general readers! Excellent !

Elizabeth Varon Appomattox: Victory, defeat, & freedom at the end of the Civil War NYC: Oxford Univ Press, 2014. 320 pp. 1 map. 32 images (numerous portraits). Notes. Index with names predominating. This book provides much more than a recounting of the conclusive defeat of Lee's Army of Northern VA. It provides a solid summary of the transition from active warfare to reconstruction / restoration efforts (1865-1867). A central bridge is the quite different perceptions of the terms of surrender as it impacts the interregnum between active, formal warfare and the Presidential Reconstruction efforts by Lincoln & Johnson. A good starting point for wrapping your mind around & attempting to understand Reconstruction. Varon employs literary & artwork sources in her analysis of the meanings attributed to the surrender at Appomattox and sectional perspectives on restoration & reconstruction. This reviewer is currently reading on wartime & postwar Reconstruction efforts in order to have a reasonable working knowledge for attending a CW conference on that subject AND to beginning an initial attempt to

Wrap his mind around that topic. The additional books on my reading list (in probable reading & overlapping time span sequence) are: Gregory Downs *After Appomattox: Military occupation & the ends of war* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015. 9 longitudinal maps on military post locations. 6 images. Notes. Index. 8 statistical appendices on the number of U.S. Army posts, soldiers, & soldiers / post; mostly longitudinally with some by region. “Statistics regarding U.S. Army deployments from 1865 to 1870, cited in the text & presented in the maps & appendices, are drawn from a database the author personally compiled from tens of thousands of departmental & divisional returns in RG 94 Entry 62 & RG 94, Entry 65, as well as from returns scattered through the individual department entries in RG 393, Port 1, all at National Archives I, Washington, DC. | The author has developed a website with digital maps, datasets, and full citations for the numerical data that is available at [...]. (p.ix) TOPICS COVERED: gunpoint emancipation, reinstituting civil gov’t, an illusion of peace, enfranchisement through martial law, & governing without force. Eric Foner *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1865-1877* Updated Edition NYC: HarperCollins, 2014. First edition published in 1988 by Harper & Row. 3 maps. 57 photographs & images. Footnotes. Selected bibliography. Index. [Author’s Introduction to the 2014 [150th] Anniversary Edition, p.xxvii-xlii. “Some brief reflections on how the book was originally written, how historical scholarship on Reconstruction has evolved in the last quarter century, and why an understanding of the period remains essential today.” (p.xxvii) GOAL: “Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution seeks to weave into a coherent narrative the political struggle over Reconstruction, the transition from slave to free labor in the South, the evolution of a new system of race relations, and the rise of a newly empowered national state, and to delineate how these processes interacted with one another.” (p.xxxiii) David W. Blight *Race & Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ Press, 2001. A few images. Notes. Index. Prolog, p1-5. SYNOPSIS: “This book is a history of how Americans remembered their most divisive & tragic experience during the 50-year period after the Civil War. It probes the interrelationship between the two broad themes of race & reunion in American culture & society from the turning point in the war (1863) to the culmination of its semicentennial in 1915. [Blight is] primarily concerned with the ways that contending memories clashed or intermingled in public memory, and not in a developing professional historiography of the Civil

War. *Reconstruction politics, reunion literature, soldiers' memory, the reminiscence industry, African American memory, the origins & uses of Memorial Day, and the Southern Lost Cause.* But in every chapter race [is] the central problem in how Americans made choices to remember and forget their Civil War. (p1) Gregory P. Downs & Kate Masur (editors) *The World the Civil War Made* Chapel Hill, NC: Univ NC Press, 2015. 1 map. 4 images. Endnotes. Index. 12 essays on new directions in Reconstruction from the 2013 Brose Lecture conference by the Richards CW Era Studies Center at Penn State. "In this volume we consider some of the ways the Civil War echoed beyond 1865 in a dynamic, crucial postwar period whose contours have often proven difficult to capture. The essays collected here explore several different regions of the [U.S.] and the circulation of ideas throughout the nation & the world." (p2) FN #1 (p17-18) recommends several histories & historiographies on Reconstruction. Another highly likely reading overlapping the era from 1861 through 1868 is: Brooks D. Simpson *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant & the Politics of War & Reconstruction 1861-1868* Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. NC Press, 1991. No images. Notes. Bibliography. Index. The preface and introduction were first read for ALL these books prior to reading Varon's *Appomattox*. Some additional sections were read relating to CW literature in three of the books. Some additional preliminary reading was done in survey sources.

This is one of the most intriguing and illuminating books I have ever read on the era of the Civil War and its aftermath (and I've read a lot!). It smashes many of the "understood" interpretations of the later 19th century in the U.S. It also points the way to the Reconstruction era, its tensions, and its ultimate, sad failure. I like Lee far less and Grant far more! It is not the first work to help edit the history of the late Civil War and the years to follow, but it does so in a uniquely human--and quite revealing--way. Here, myth has been edited by truth.

This is a detailed account of the end of the Civil War. It goes well beyond a retelling of the Grant-Lee meeting at Appomattox. It shows how the North and South differed significantly in their interpretations of what the North's victory meant and would mean going forward. I recommend this book to the reader with a casual interest in US History, as well as the Civil War buff who is interested in the immediate post-war period.

Excellent book--well written & thorough in scholarship. Worth the time for anyone interested in Civil

War history & its ongoing impact in American life.

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